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## VI Baltic Sea Region Film History Conference

### Genres and Their Transformations: The Global and Local Contexts, Production, and Reception\*

Riga, Latvia, 14-15 October, 2020  
Latvian Academy of Culture

#### Keynotes

**Ewa Mazierska**

***Contemporary Polish Biopics***

My paper will discuss the upsurge of biopics in contemporary Polish cinema. I will draw attention to the fact that since around 2010 several biopics have been produced each year. They achieve great popularity and critical acclaim, topping the box office in a specific year. Such popularity reflects audiences' interest in historical truth, especially concerning the state socialist period, yet presented in a more entertaining way than that offered by documentary films. The new topics are much more varied than those, which prevailed in earlier periods. In particular, along with the films about 'proper' historical figures, such as politicians and artists, we also find films about people who affected the history of their country, but in a more subtle way, most importantly doctors, who are at the centre of *Bogowie (Gods, 2014)*, directed by Łukasz Palkowski and dedicated to Ryszard Religa, a cardiologist who made the first heart transplant in Poland, and *Sztuka kochania (The Art of Loving, 2017)* by Maria Sadowska, about Michalina Wisłocka, the author of the first 'sex manual', published in Poland and on which I will focus my paper. I will argue that such films offer a more nuanced view of Poland under state socialism. Rather than dividing characters into dissidents and collaborators with the system, they focus on those who collaborated with the system, but not because of their ideological conviction or conformity, but for the 'greater good' of their country, and offer a bottom-up vision of the past. In my paper, I will draw on research about historical and biographical films, especially the division between psycho and socio-biography.

**Ewa Mazierska** is Professor of Film Studies, at the University of Central Lancashire. She published over thirty monographs and edited collections on film and popular music. They include *Popular Viennese Electronic Music, 1990-2015: A Cultural History* (Routledge: 2019) and *Poland Daily: Economy, Work, Consumption and Social Class in Polish Cinema* (Berghahn, 2017). Mazierska's work has been translated into over twenty languages. She is principal editor of Routledge journal, *Studies in Eastern European Cinema*.

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## **Jörg Schweinitz**

### ***Stereotype, Allusion, Hybridity and the Concept of Genre***

The presentation will outline a theoretical view of 'genre' based on the aesthetic concept of 'stereotype'. The historicity of genre will be emphasized and it will be shown how to approach the genre-reflexive cinema of the years around 2000 on this basis and how to grasp concepts like allusion and hybridity in this context.

The lecture is based on a concept developed by the author in his book *Film and Stereotype: A Challenge for Cinema and Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

**Jörg Schweinitz** is professor emeritus of film studies at the University of Zurich, Department of Film Studies. His research interests and projects focusses on the history of film theory and criticism, on the history of stereotyped cinematic forms, including genre, and on the pictorial dimension in early cinema. His publications in English include: *Film and Stereotype: A Challenge for Cinema and Theory* (New York: Columbia UP 2011). See for more: [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Joerg\\_Schweinitz](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Joerg_Schweinitz)

## **Yuri Tsivian**

### ***Cinema, "Russian" Cinema, "Baltic" Cinema: What Makes us Think of Films as Being Regional or National?"***

The Russian Empire; Soviet Russia; Russian émigrés in Germany and France... Silent movies made in these three "Russias" between 1908 and 1929 were markedly different in style. Why? What marks these movies as "Russian" in the eye of contemporaries and present-day historians? More generally, what properties of style and subject matter allow us to identify movies as "national", be it Russian, American or Japanese? My talk will be a brief history not of any national cinema in particular, but of the notion of nation as applied to cinema between 1895 and 1930.

**Yuri Tsivian** is William Colvin Emeritus Professor of Film and Media Studies at the University of Chicago (USA), Ph.D., St. Petersburg State University (formerly Leningrad State University). Research Interests: history of film and film styles; film and Russian/Soviet art; filmmakers Dziga Vertov; Sergei Eisenstein; old versus new media; gesture and performance; film editing - history, theory and practice.

## **Abstracts**

### **Gunhild Agger**

#### ***Transformations of Nordic Noir in TV Series***

In my article "Realistic and mythological appropriations: the cases of *Shetland* and *Ø*" (forthcoming 2020), I discern two different origins of Nordic noir – the tradition of social realism and the tradition of gothic thrillers. A critical attitude is often involved in both traditions, in the first case directed towards prevailing economic and political systems, in the second case not rarely combined with an ecological perspective. Since 2013, in the area of TV series, these main tendencies have distinctly appeared in the Nordic noir-inspired universe in the UK or France as well as in the further development of Nordic noir in the Nordic countries.

I shall take my point of departure in two cases, *Follow the Money* (DR 2016-2019) and *Thin Ice* (C More, TV 2, Yellowbird, 2020). Where social realism in new forms has appeared in *Follow the Money*, the gothic thriller tradition in the wake of Mary Shelley's classic *Frankenstein* (1818) permeates *Thin Ice*. In *Follow the Money*, I shall focus on season 3 (2019), characterizing the prevailing urban realism in the development and twists of the plot, in the sense that fiction comments recent financial scandals, and in the diversity of the cast. In *Thin Ice*, I shall focus on the Greenlandic location and the way in which it facilitates the opposition between salient alternatives in Arctic geopolitics. I shall highlight the wider implications of these tendencies in Nordic noir.

**Gunhild Agger**, Professor emerita, Dep. of Culture and Global Studies, Aalborg University. She has published widely on television drama, history of media and genres, national and transnational film, bestsellers and blockbusters. Director of the collaborative, cross-disciplinary research programme *Crime fiction and Crime journalism in Scandinavia* (2007–11) and a member of the research team in the programme *What makes Danish Television Drama Series Travel?* (2014-2018). Recent articles published in *Journal of Popular Television*, *Series*, *Kosmorama*, *Northern Lights* and *Journal of Scandinavian Cinema*. New book, *Det grænseløse tv-drama*, forthcoming 2020.

### **Zane Balčus**

#### ***Participatory Mode in Recent Latvian Documentary Cinema***

The term genre is less frequently used in the studies of documentary cinema, as this form of production more strongly tends to resist generalizations of thematic, narrative or stylistic norms. Approaches like modalities (Michael Renov), modes (Bill Nichols, Carl Plantinga), and others are used to distinguish documentary films. Participatory mode, as proposed by Nichols, will be explored in this paper in relation to three recent Latvian documentaries. In this approach, filmmakers are part of the narrative, shaping the story unfolding in front of the camera. In the films *Documentarian* (*Dokumentālists*, Ivars Zviedris, 2012), *My Father the Banker* (*Mans tēvs baņķieris*, Ieva Ozoliņa, 2015), and *Forging Condors* (*Kondoru kalve*, Mārtiņš Grauds, 2018) variations of participatory mode will be explored, testing relevancy of Nichol's approach in contemporary Latvian documentary.

**Zane Balčus**, Mg.art., is a junior research assistant at the Scientific Research Centre of the Latvian Academy of Culture. Balčus has an extensive experience in management and curatorial areas in the field of cinema. She is a co-author of books *Inscenējumu realitāte. Latvijas aktierkino vēsture* (*Reality of Staging. A History of Latvian Fiction Film*) (Riga, 2011), *Rolanda Kalniņa telpa* (*The Cinematic Space of Rolands Kalniņš*) (Riga, 2018), has published articles in academic journals, and is a freelance film critic.

### **Inese Boka-Grübe**

#### ***Distribution of Historical Films as a Process of Creating New Cultural Artefacts***

Historical films tend to reach a wide audience in the 21st century, even though hundred years have passed after the events reflected in these films (internationally – *1917* (2020), *Ida* (2013), *Cold War* (2018), within the Baltic States region – *The Blizzard of Souls* (2019), *The Mover* (2018), *Dovlatov* (2018), HBO series *Chernobyl* (2019), etc.). Filmmakers representing the

second and third generation after the events, who do not have a direct experience towards the real-life stories reflected in these films, create these films.

The reasons why historical topics become relevant in cinema at this particular time can be found within the mechanisms of functioning of culture. The popularity of historical films among audiences allows to argue that by including the marketing and distribution of film in a cultural context, it is possible not only to expand the field of film's reception and distribution, but also to understand the era and its values, in which the film becomes a communication tool of historical themes. Film language in an interaction with other cultural languages allows the film to cover a broad cultural field in the process of distribution, allowing the film to become a cultural event. Message of the film and its marketing message on the level of semiotic interpretation coincides or is subject to similar communication conditions, which allows for the marketing and distribution of these films to be in line with the artistic message and narrative of the film.

**Inese Boka-Grūbe**, Mg.art., one of the founders of the Riga-based Mistrus Media, producing the feature and documentary films, among them: *The Chronicles of Melanie* (2016), *Breathing Into Marble* (2018). *The Mover* (2018).

**Dārta Ceriņa**

***Objects of Desire and the Soviet Detective: Where Sergei Eisenstein and Aloizs Brenčs Would Meet?***

In Sergei Eisenstein's (1898–1948) *The Composition of Psychology*, a particular place has been dedicated to the form of detective story and its build-up. The director and film theorist writes that historically, the process of designing puzzles has been rooted within the culture of noble, educated, or clergy-worshippers in Ancient Greece, China, and India. In Eisenstein's opinion, the detective is the most effective and purified construction in literature which conveys a precise social stratification.

The dynamics of the relationship between the seeker and the object, desirable objects and lack of them being sought can be expressed through symmetry or asymmetry in the plot's metonymy. Notably asymmetrical searches can be traced in Aloizs Brenčs' (1929–1998) filmography, which combines the detective, crime and melodrama genres, permeates the images of the detective-investigator and the objects sought.

The search overlaps with conventions of genres and the reality of Soviet cinema, which in turn forms an iconic-symbolic relationship between seeker and object of desire, investigator and image of lust action initiator, tackling detective genre's social face. This essay will fixate the encounter of Eisenstein's theoretization on riddle art, Brenčs' objects and imagos of desire and structure of detective genre during the Soviet rule.

**Dārta Ceriņa**, Bc.art., Research assistant at the Advanced Research Centre of the Latvian Academy of Culture, Master's student at University of Tartu, M.A.

**Lina Kaminskaitė-Jančorienė, Juozapas Paškauskas**

***Early Cinema in Lithuania: Genre and Program***

The paper will present early film culture in Lithuania (1900-1914), focusing on film screenings, film programs. What films were shown? Which movie genre was the most (un)popular? Is it possible to identify different audiences and their tastes? The reconstruction will be based on

the analysis of film screenings' advertisements, short comments and reviews about cinemas, films and film programs published in Lithuanian, Polish, Russian periodicals.

The presentation is based on the research project, which aims to reconsider national cinema history canon and to put local cinema culture development into the transnational explorations on early cinema. The study of Lithuanian case, as the periphery of Russian empire, can suggest new findings about tastes and habits of the audiences in the periphery, the modernization of daily life of urban cultures and the impact of the industrial infrastructure to the development of local film culture.

**Lina Kaminskaitė-Jančorienė** is a cinema and culture historian, media researcher, associate professor of Film studies at Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre, leading research project curator at NGO Meno avilys, guest researcher at Utrecht University (2019-2020). Co-author of two books and author of articles published in books and journals *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, *Jahrbuch für Geschichte des ländlichen Raumes*, *Politologija*, etc. Her recent project *Early Cinema in Lithuania: National, Imperial and Global Networks* (Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre).

**Juozapas Paškauskas** received his PhD in 2017, he works as a junior researcher at Lithuanian Theatre and Music Academy and Lithuanian Institute of History.

**Jānis Matvejs**

***Housing Memories in Riga: WWI and its Aftermath – Representation of the Apartment in Soviet Cinema and Now***

Geography of film provides information on new historiographic perspectives in architecture, space and the imagination of urban environment. This presentation contributes to the field of human geography by conducting a content analysis of a vast number of films made between the early 1910s and present time (documentary, fiction film, animated film) focusing on the development and spatial organization of living spaces in Riga.

The research elucidates the construction of meaning of space and housing memory, where relations of dominance are defined and contested in visual representation of Riga's apartments. A qualitative research methodology was used based on best practices of human geography data transcription and coding. The main findings show that living spaces are frequently portrayed in the Soviet cinema, and form an integral part of Soviet urban perception. However, state-imposed censorship throughout the Soviet period strictly regulated geographical disposition in representing living spaces through intensifying or neglecting particular areas of Riga.

**Jānis Matvejs** (b. Riga, 1991) received the degree of Bachelor of Arts from the Latvian Academy of Culture in 2014 and the degree of Master of Geography from the University of Latvia in 2016. Since 2016, he has been a Ph. D. student at the University of Latvia. The topic of his thesis is "Architecture and its representation in Soviet cinema: the case of Riga". Within the framework of the studies, a research has been carried out at the University of Chiang Mai (Thailand), analyzing the appearance of the city of Bangkok in 20th century films. His current research interests are urban landscape, city and suburban space, cinematography, cultural geography, visual methods in geographical research.

**Eva Näripea**

***Porous Borders and Secret Agents: The Genre of Spy Film in Soviet Estonian Cinema***

This presentation looks at spy films – one of the least popular and most ideologically tainted genres on Soviet Estonian cinescape. Specifically, I will concentrate on Western secret agents breaching the border between the capitalist and socialist spheres in *Uninvited Guests* (*Kutsumata külalised*, Igor Eltsov, 1959) and *Lost* (*Valge laev*, Kalju Komissarov, 1970). Made with substantial involvement of the KGB, which also determined their ideological discourse, these screen works still provide fascinating glimpses into the desires and anxieties of the Soviet(ised) psyche.

**Eva Näripea**, PhD, is the Director of the Film Archives of the National Archives of Estonia and Deputy Editor of Studies in Eastern European Cinema. Her current research focuses on histories and practices of preserving and curating film heritage.

**Elīna Reitere**

***Fictional Ties between Filmic Universes: Latvian Historical Films 2018-2019***

Reviewing the Latvian film *Blizzard of Souls*, that generated the most admissions in the Latvian cinemas in 2019, *The Hollywood Reporter* used the tagline “A more realistic 1917, but it’s still a surrealistic war.” Even though it wasn’t a coincidence that two films concerning the WW I were released almost at the same time, what interests me most are the ties between different films that tell us about historically related events and are premiered over a very short period of time. In my paper, I will employ the concept of preposterous history, proposed by Mieke Bal. It is a way of doing history where the later art reconfigures works of art made earlier. New contexts that emerge can thus be described as perverse meanings (Janet Steiger).

**Elīna Reitere**, Dr. phil., is an independent film scholar and critic, 2<sup>nd</sup> editor-in-chief of the Latvian film magazine kinoraksti.lv. She studied audiovisual culture, film, media and performance studies in Riga and Mainz. For her academic film reviews she has been nominated for Normunds Naumanis Prize for Art criticism in Latvia in 2019.

**Dita Rietuma**

***The Lost Tradition of Making Quality TV Series: Latvian Case***

The importance of, so-called, quality series is growing rapidly. In the era of media convergence, nonlinear distribution channels and different platforms, the impact of the series is huge. Unfortunately the series of small European countries, particularly, Latvia is not present on global platforms. Does Latvia produce such content? Why the production of the Latvian quality series is nearly non-existing during last decades? During Soviet times Latvian film industry (Riga Film studio) was producing also the series which was commissioned by Moscow Central TV. Some of them – for example, TV series made by director Aloizis Brenčs were extremely popular and exceptional and might be considered as the classics of Latvian quality series. The mini-series *Mirage* (*Mirāža*), series *The Long Road in the Dunes* (*Ilgais ceļš kāpās*) made by the director A.Brenčs which both were highly popular in entire Soviet Union, and might be considered as the examples of the “heist movie” and historical melodrama. One of the most popular films by director Janis Streičs – 2 part mini-series, melodrama *Theatre* (*Teātris*) was commissioned by Moscow Central TV as well.

Why Latvian film industry lost the craft of making TV series since 90-ies? The reasons can be found in the practice of the financing of the film and TV production, limitations of the financial possibilities, etc. The situation slightly changed since 2018 with the availability of extra funding, as well – the appearance of the new players – different VOD platforms. Current year – 2020 – brought new challenges and surprises. Even the most prominent theatre director Alvis Hermanis started to work on TV series and National Film Centre of Latvia announced the first competition for quality TV series. Are we entering the new era in the history of Latvian cinema or just trying to reconstruct the continuity of the lost tradition?

**Dita Rietuma**, Dr.Art., graduated from Moscow Film Institute (VGIK). For more than 20 years worked as the editor and the film critic of the Latvian newspaper *Diena*. In 2014 became the Director of Latvian National Film Centre – governmental organisation responsible for the film policy and strategy in Latvia. Rietuma continues lecturing at Riga Stradins University, where she is an assistant professor. Rietuma also is a researcher at the Advanced Research Institute of the Latvian Academy of Culture. She is the author of five books and hundreds of articles dedicated to contemporary film and film history.

**Jana Taperte, Sanda Rapa**

***Silence and Speech in Narrative Structure of Slow Cinema (Laila Pakalniņa's The Shoe and Dāvis Sīmanis' Exiled)***

For the analysis, two Latvian films (Laila Pakalniņa's *The Shoe* (Kurpe, 1998) and Dāvis Sīmanis' *Exiled* (Pelnu sanatorija, 2016)) were chosen. Both films, firstly, share poetics and stylistic tropes of so called slow cinema aesthetics, e.g., employment of long takes, de-dramatised narrative mode, emphasis on mundanity and quietude, secondly, they are debut features of documentary directors, so it is assumed that the impact of documentary aesthetics might be present in these films.

In our talk, we intend to analyse the importance of speech (and absence of speech) for the storytelling strategies employed in the films, e.g., verbal and non-verbal interaction between characters, as well as speech in a broader sense as part of the films' soundscape.

**Jana Taperte** is a research assistant at the Latvian Language Institute of the University of Latvia and a PhD candidate in linguistics. She has completed several bachelor and master level courses in film theory and is particularly interested in applying linguistic methods to film analysis and in studies on cinematic soundscape

**Sanda Rapa**, *Dr. philol.*, is a researcher at the Latvian Language Institute of the University of Latvia, linguist, onomastician with particular interest in film semiotics. She has completed several master level courses in film semiotics and has integrated linguistic approach into analysis of film narrative structure

**Mantė Valiūnaitė**

***Changing Documentary Cinema Practices in Lithuanian Cinema: Acid Forest and Animus Animalis (A Story about People, Animals and Things)***

There were many changes in documentary cinema field in recent decade. Documentary cinema was brought closer to artists' moving image and fiction practices. The paper seeks to analyze two Lithuanian documentary films, which plays with documentary cinema practices in order to

re-evaluate the way we represent human relation with animals in cinema: Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė's *Acid Forest* and Aistė Žegulytė's *Animus Animalis (A Story about People, Animals and Things)*. Seen within the local context they use similar style to Lithuanian poetic documentary cinema, but find new and original aesthetic choices to articulate relevant topics of today. In the global context these two films come close to hybrid cinema, which became widely appreciated by different documentary film festivals since 2010. By analyzing those films, I will demonstrate new genre practices in Lithuanian documentary cinema and show how it relates with international changes of documentary cinema.

**Mantė Valiūnaitė** is currently studying at PhD programme at the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre. Her research is focused on hybrid cinema. She has participated in organizing 5<sup>th</sup> Baltic Sea Region Film History Conference in 2019. Valiūnaitė is an Artistic Director at Vilnius International Film Festival *Kino pavasaris*. She has worked as a programmer at International Human Rights Documentary Film Festival *Inconvenient Films* for 3 years. Valiūnaitė curates various projects in NGO Meno avilys. In addition, she regularly writes for magazine *Kinas* and weekly cultural paper *7 Days of Art*.